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THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY THOMAS F. MEEHAN.

By the terms of the Apostolic Constitution "*Sapienti consilio*" Pius X decreed that, on November 3rd, 1908, the United States should cease to be regarded as a missionary country and on that date should pass from the tutelage of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda to his own immediate supervision. The change is most important as affecting not only the membership of the great religious body over which he exercises his jurisdiction, but incidentally the whole community in which it occupies so influential a position. It is the purpose of this article to give a detailed description of the organization of the Catholic Church in the United States.

In these days of social unrest and threatened conflict between labor and capital, reference is often made by political economists to the reliance many place on the Catholic Church as an effective barrier against the menacing forces of anarchy and disorder. Ever a conservative influence on the side of constituted authority, with its wonderful and comprehensive detail, the Church reaches into every hamlet of the land, into every walk of life, warning her millions of adherents that they are bound in conscience to heed the moral law as she interprets it, and conform to the civil law as administered by its justly ordained officials, drawing strictly the line of ownership, and the duties, in their separate spheres, of employer and employee. On the human side, the democracy of the Church appeals forcefully to the American mind. To her priesthood, taken mainly from the ranks of the people, her highest offices are open, personal merit and capacity being the all-potent factors of promotion. The peasant-born Joseph Sarto,

placed on the throne of St. Peter by the ballots of his peers, is the latest notable instance of this.

"America has a good right to be called the eldest daughter of the Church; for, although she entered last among the nations, she has given proofs of her loyalty, devotion and tolerance," said Pius X addressing a band of Catholic pilgrims from various parts of the United States to whom he accorded a recent audience.

The statistics of the Catholic Church Officials for 1908 claim that there are now 23,452,426 members of the faith living under the protection of the Stars and Stripes. Of these 13,877,426 are in the United States; 7,058,699 in the Philippines; 1,578,862 in Cuba; 1,000,000 in Porto Rico and 32,000 in the Sandwich Islands. How few know of the workings, the constitution and the management of the vast executive machine by which this great section of the republic is directed in its religious thought and action.

In the United States, the Catholic community is now divided into fourteen provinces or archdioceses, with 78 suffragan sees or dioceses. In these there are a Cardinal, 15 Archbishops, 91 Bishops, 15,655 priests, 12,513 churches, 4,443 schools with 1,136,906 pupils; 268 colleges and 997 institutions sheltering 1,310,300 children. Each diocese is independent in itself, like the States of our Union. Each Bishop is as supreme in his own diocese as is the Governor of a State. The priests are of two kinds—8,408 diocesan or secular clerics and 4,105 members of the regular Orders. The diocesan priests, ordained as subjects of the several dioceses, are bound in obedience to the Bishop of that diocese and cannot leave it without his permission, nor would they be received elsewhere without an "*exeat*," the formal document which states that they are in good standing and had received the Bishop's sanction for withdrawal. These priests take the vows of obedience and celibacy only. The "regular" priests, or those belonging to the Orders, such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, Redemptorists, Benedictines and the like, and living in community, take an additional vow of poverty. Individually, the latter do not own anything and are immediately subject to their superiors and not to the Bishop. They cannot locate in a diocese without the Bishop's permission; but once they are admitted he has no control over them individually or over their property. Of course, they must comply with the ordinary can-

onical regulations, but otherwise they are individually outside his jurisdiction.

The diocesan priests are subject to the Bishop's will and can be moved about as he sees fit. The only exceptions to this are the rectors of a certain number of parishes incumbency of which brings permanency of tenure. Removal from them can only be effected for grave offences and after due trial. These permanent or "irremovable" rectorships number about ten per cent. of the parishes in the diocese, and appointment to them is won in a competitive examination limited to those who have been ordained priests fifteen years, who have served five years as pastors, and who have shown special ability as executives, besides moral and sacerdotal zeal and worth. These permanent rectors have the right when the Bishop dies to vote for the three names that are sent to Rome as those of the candidates worthy to succeed to the office. The Bishops of the province also send a similar list of three names, which may be the same as, or different from, those decided on by the priests as they deem best. For the nomination of Bishops, the Pope is supreme and free in his choice. He may, if he considers it best, discard both the lists submitted by the priests and the Bishops and name an outside candidate of his own selection. This is done when local differences among the electors or general conditions indicate that the choice of a neutral stranger might be beneficial to the harmony, discipline and progress of the Church in the diocese in question; but due regard is usually paid to the nominations made by the local electors. The Archbishops are usually promoted from some suffragan or other see, and in their selection the Pope generally has the suggestion and counsel of the other members of the hierarchy, but is in no way bound to act on their opinions. He can send a Bishop from a foreign see to take charge if he wishes, as was done, for instance, in the case of Mgr. Persico, at Savannah, in 1870.

The official head of this body is not Cardinal Gibbons, as is commonly supposed. The ranking prelate of the Church in the United States is the Apostolic Delegate, His Excellency the Most Rev. Diomede Falconio, Titular Archbishop of Larissa. As the personal representative of the Pope, he takes precedence at all ecclesiastical functions. Cardinal Gibbons has no jurisdiction outside the limits of the archdiocese of Baltimore, which comprises only the counties of Maryland lying west of the Chesapeake Bay

and the District of Columbia, of which he is the Metropolitan. His office of Cardinal gives him no more episcopal authority than is enjoyed by any other member of the hierarchy in the United States, each Bishop being supreme within the limits of his own diocese. Baltimore, however, was the first see created in the United States, so its Archbishop, by request of the other prelates, and with the sanction of a special decree of the Pope, is given the right of presiding over the deliberations of the hierarchy when they are assembled together. Other than this, Cardinal Gibbons has no personal authority over any Catholic or ecclesiastic in the United States outside the limits of the archdiocese of Baltimore. In Rome, he would take his place in the College of Cardinals, which is, as it were, the Senate of the Church.

The autonomy of each diocese, like that of the States of the Union, is strictly defined. The Bishop of each is appointed directly by the Pope, and divides his jurisdiction therein with no one. He is responsible for its proper administration only to Rome. The Archbishops for some time have met in council once a year to discuss matters of Church policy, but their deliberations are advisory only. The Bishops of a province at times meet in a provincial council to legislate on local business. When all the hierarchy of the country assemble together, the assembly is called a Plenary Council, and the decrees thereat enacted, when considered and sanctioned at Rome, are promulgated for the government of the Church throughout the country. There have been three of these Plenary Councils held so far, the first in 1852, the second in 1866 and the third in 1879.

Once a Bishop is appointed to his see, he is ever after during his life a charge on the diocese, unless he voluntarily relinquishes his claims. Owing to the great increase of Catholics in the country, nearly all the Bishops have either coadjutors or auxiliary Bishops. The coadjutors are now appointed with the right of succession; the auxiliaries have not this right. Neither have any jurisdiction in a diocese except what the Bishop in charge may assign them. These assistant prelates take their titles from some of the extinct sees in the Far East. When, a little more than a hundred years ago, the foundation of the first Catholic Cathedral in the United States was laid in Baltimore, there were only one Bishop, 50 priests and about 100,000 Catholics in the whole country.

In dividing up the country, the Church does not follow the civic or political boundaries, though in creating the fourteen provinces and their 78 suffragan sees some care is taken to try and have them conform, as far as convenient, to the restrictions of State lines. The dioceses are subdivided into deaneries, and these into the separate parishes and missions. The pastors are appointed by the Bishops. The laity have no participation whatever in their selection. The salaries of the priests are paid by each parish. The pastor gets, in New York, \$800 a year, with a house and his board. There is no increase in this amount, no matter how long he serves, and it is the same for St. Patrick's great Cathedral and for the humblest country parish. In other dioceses, the salaries range about the same. In some few, the pastors get \$1,000 a year, but never any more.

Where the parishes are large the pastor is allowed a number of assistants in accordance with the needs of the people. During the first three years after ordination, these assistants receive a salary of \$500 a year, and then \$600 with board until they become pastors. The offerings made by the people at baptisms, weddings, etc., go into a common fund used to support the parish rectory and are not the personal perquisites of the officiating clergyman. Each parish is a unit, and the rector of one cannot officiate in another without the permission of the priest in charge. The laity must also attend and support the church of the parish within whose limits they reside if they expect the ministrations of its priests. They cannot go about at will.

The Bishop's salary is paid by what is called "*the Cathedral-icum*"—that is, a tax laid on each parish according to its numerical or financial standing. In New York, this ranges from \$200 a year, paid by the great city parishes, to a nominal sum from the poorer ones. It might be inferred from this that the income of the prelate of a large see—like New York, for instance—was an imposing sum. What the Archbishop of such a see thus receives is almost immediately paid out again. His household is an expensive item, with a constant succession of distinguished visiting prelates. He must travel much about the diocese, and he is ever the dispenser of help to many poor and needy parishes which look to him for aid. No American prelate would be considered a man of any fortune, and none of them so far has ever left any but a nominal estate.

Cardinal Manning used to say that the true priest dies without money and without debts, and, as a general rule, priests and prelates aim at this standard, although they are not bound by any vow of poverty, except in the case of priests belonging to the regular Orders. When a Bishop is appointed to a see, he makes an official and duplicate will, by the terms of which the property he may die seized of is passed on to two of his associate Bishops in trust for the diocese. Parish property in New York, and generally also elsewhere, is vested in a corporation made up of the Bishop, the Vicar-General, the pastor and two laymen. The pastor, of course, directs the affairs, but he cannot make any large expenditures or engage in any operations of importance without the sanction of the Bishop and the diocesan council. A pastor may be moved about, except in the case of the "missionary" or permanent rectors, at the will of the Bishop. If the pastor, however, feels that an injustice has been done him, he can appeal from the Bishop to the Apostolic Delegate at Washington, and through him to Rome, and the cases are not unknown where the priest has won, though Rome is usually very slow to decide against episcopal authority.

The officials assisting a Bishop in the administration of diocesan affairs are the Vicar-General, who acts for the Bishop in all except the essentially episcopal attributes; the Chancellor, who looks after the records and issues the dispensations; the six Consultors, three of whom are named by the Bishop and three by the priests themselves; the School Board; the Examiners of the Clergy, the Theological Censors, the Diocesan Attorney, the Defender of the Marriage Bond, who has charge of all disputed matrimonial cases; and the Rural Deans, who are pastors in country districts charged with the supervision in minor details of several neighboring parishes.

Candidates for the priesthood must have been born in lawful wedlock and must follow a six years' theological and philosophical course in a seminary after making the ordinary classical studies of a collegiate education. A priest must be twenty-four years old before he can be ordained, and a Bishop thirty years at his consecration. At his ordination a priest takes a vow of celibacy and the one of obedience to the Bishop in whose diocese he locates. The diocese is bound to support him as long as he lives in it and is in good standing. If he has no parish charge he is supported

out of a fund made up of contributions of \$10 a year from each parish. Recent immigration has brought here about 300,000 Ruthenian Catholics of the Greek Rite. Among these some of the priests are married, this custom being tolerated among the Orientals but not among the Latins. They recognize the Pope as the head of their Church and are subject to the Bishops in whose dioceses they reside. No Catholic, however, may pass from one Rite to another without special permission from Rome, and only the gravest necessity makes it lawful for a priest of one Rite to administer the sacraments to a person of another Rite. A Bishop who resides in Philadelphia has recently been appointed by the Pope to look after their special interests. Two other Bishops care for the Poles, Huns and other Slavs.

The expenses of the ecclesiastical students at the seminaries are defrayed by the diocese, each parish sending to the fund for this purpose the proceeds of a collection made annually. Priests in the street wear the distinctive dress of their calling. They cannot go, according to diocesan rules, to races nor to the theatre. A priest cannot sue in a court concerning a temporal affair until it is impossible to settle the matter otherwise. If he brings matters of Church discipline into a civil court, he incurs a special excommunication. In the house ecclesiastics wear a long garment reaching to the ground called a cassock. For priests it is black; for Bishops and the Monsignori it is purple; for Cardinals red, and for the Pope white. The three-cornered cap worn by the clergy, the biretta, matches the cassock in color.

Priests who live in community and follow a special rule of life are called "regulars" and belong to the various Orders. Each of these Orders is separate in itself, and has different purposes and rules for its members, as well as a different dress or habit. These ecclesiastics take a vow of poverty as well as that of chastity and obedience. All their goods are owned in common. The Jesuits, contrary to the commonly accepted idea, based on the stage and fiction variety of the Order, cannot accept any ecclesiastical honors or preferment. If they do, they at once cease to be members of the Order. The "Jesuit in disguise" living in the world, and the layman Jesuit, are other fictions; and there never was, and never could be, such a thing as a female Jesuit.

Members of the other Orders, however, can take ecclesiastical

dignities without ceasing to be members of these bodies. Bishops who belong to any of these Orders, when promoted, wear cassocks that are the color of the habit or distinctive dress of the community. It is for this reason that Mgr. Falconio, the Apostolic Delegate, who is a Franciscan, wears gray silk in place of the purple of his rank as Archbishop. Some of the Orders are given charge of parishes by the Bishops. In this connection they are subject to him in what relates to purely parochial matters. The headquarters of most of the great Orders is in Rome, where the Father-General and his executive staff reside. The growing influence of the Church in the United States is shown by the fact that several of these high officials have come from this side of the Atlantic, and among the lieutenants of all are men selected for their knowledge of customs and conditions here. Father Martin, the recently deceased General of the Jesuits, was the first to have an American among the five "Assistants" who govern the Order. This official was Father Rudolph J. Meyer, a native of St. Louis, and he was the director of the English-speaking Jesuits of the whole world.

There are now forty-three Orders of men and one hundred and nine communities of women bound by the vows of regular religious life living in the United States. Of the communities of men, ten are communities of what are usually called "Brothers." They are not priests in Holy Orders and do not seek ordination, but live in community under the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Their usual occupation is teaching in the schools. Their membership is about 5,000.

In the regular Orders, there are besides the priests also Brothers who are not ordained, but live in the community under its rule. They do the manual work of the house as their special avocation, while following the spiritual life also.

The communities of women, the nuns or Sisters, have a membership of about 50,000 and aid the clergy in the schools and charitable institutions. Each of their associations is distinct in itself and has no affiliation or relation to any other. Some are strictly cloistered and never leave the convent enclosure, nor mingle with the outside world, and lead a life of prayer and contemplation. The majority, however, do not observe such strict rules, and in their duties as teachers and nurses have a more active participation in the life around them. Each community

governs itself and elects its own officers under the supervision of the Bishop of the diocese and a chaplain or director appointed by him. He has no direct control, however, over the individual members, who, as among the men, are subject immediately to their own superiors. Each Order has what is called a "Cardinal Protector" at Rome, who acts as a sort of attorney for it in looking out for its interests before the ecclesiastical courts or elsewhere. These Sisters and nuns take no part in ecclesiastical ceremonies. The rule of the Church is very strict against women assuming any ministerial functions in the liturgical ceremonies. In this connection the enforcement by the present Pope of the canons excluding women from church choirs will be remembered. Female priests or preachers are absolutely impossible in the Catholic view. The different dresses or habits which the Sisters assume are a mere matter of taste on the part of the founders of each Order, who in this wish to take on the badge of humility and disregard of worldly vanities.

There is no "Church member," as the term is understood among Protestant denominations, recognized in the Catholic body. The Church claims in its full membership every baptized soul of every age and condition of life. The laity have many pious sodalities or confraternities, branches of which exist in every parish, and at least twenty national organizations, growing in numbers and efficiency every year, all working for the spiritual, intellectual, moral and social benefit of their own members and of the country at large. No layman, however, is authorized to assume sacerdotal prerogatives in Church ministrations. The law that restricts ministerial function to the recipients of Holy Orders is rigidly enforced and obeyed. The great charity organization is the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which dispenses thousands to the needy poor without the drawback of a big salary list. The members contribute their services free and many of the ideas of their system have been adopted by the experts in the modern machinery of organized charity and trained philanthropy. A National Federation of Catholic Societies has recently been organized which is intended to make their concrete influence available for the promotion and protection of Catholic interests. The private schools and charitable institutions which Catholics support with such favorable results are object-lessons in civic economy. It is not true that Catholics are opposed to the public-school system

as such. Their contention is that an education divorced from religious teaching is not complete or adequate. Therefore, as this essential is lacking in the school system supplied by the state, they feel bound in conscience to provide one of their own in which religion will find its proper place. Their hope is that in time their fellow citizens will, in justice, allow them out of the public taxes levied for educational expenses such proportion for results as their free schools show and as is the custom in Germany and elsewhere. No priest can publish a book touching on faith or morals and have it regarded as orthodox unless it bears the official sanction of his Bishop. No member of a religious Order can publish a work without the approval of his superior.

Nearly one-half of the great army of immigrants arriving in our ports every week are Catholics; hence, for them and those who have preceded them, has come the necessity of organizing parishes on racial lines which, wherever possible, are placed in charge of priests of the people's own nationality. Italian is now one of the regular studies in most of the seminaries, and a special training-school for Italian priests for the American missions has been organized in Italy. Similar effort is being undertaken for the Poles and Slavs. Experience with the Germans indicates that racial parish lines hardly survive the second generation, so certain is the assimilation of the foreign element into the general body politic.

All Catholic cemeteries are owned by the Church. Plots in them are not sold outright. Merely the privilege of sepulture, which is revokable at the will of the authorities, is given for the fees paid. This money, after the necessary expenses of the cemetery are met, must be spent for charitable or religious purposes. Cemeteries cannot be managed as profit-making corporations. Denial of burial within consecrated ground is regarded as one of the severest penalties the Church has enacted for recalcitrant members.

In the losses which the Church has sustained in the United States in the past century, a considerable proportion is due to mixed marriages. The Church gives reluctant consent to such unions and strips the ceremony of every detail of dignity. It cannot be performed in a church, and the priest officiating cannot impart the usual wedding blessing of the ritual, or wear any of the sacred vestments with which he is clothed when both

parties are Catholics. He merely stands as the official witness to the formal contract of matrimony entered into by the two parties interested. A dispensation for the marriage must also be secured from the Bishop, acting as the representative of the Pope, and before this is granted the non-Catholic must sign a written stipulation that there shall be no interference with the religious practices of the Catholic party, and that all children born of the union shall be brought up Catholics. The Catholic position against divorce for any cause is too well known to need more than a reference. No priest will marry people who are strangers to him; nor a couple from another parish without notice to their pastor. Banns must be called in church three times before the ceremony, unless a dispensation is secured from the Chancellor of the diocese acting for the Bishop. The ceremony is hedged about with many regulations that must be complied with to make it canonical.

On all sides it is apparent that much of the prejudice, mistrust and apprehension that once marked the attitude of many of their fellow citizens towards Catholics and their Church has given way to appreciation of its position, confidence in its loyalty and a sincere desire on the part of every intelligent American that all its force should be used as a spiritual leaven in the community against all that is sham in ethics, dangerous in philosophy and subversive in political economy.

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